

Autonomie und Verantwortung: Governance in Schule und Hochschule

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Governance: Zwischen Anspruch und Realität (Podiumsdiskussion)

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The importance of "good education" is commonly recognised, even though the concept is dependent on the culture we are living in. Measuring and comparing the achievements of educational systems in different countries by performances of our youth in reading, math or science is maybe the easiest way out - we are able to share the same opinion of the high value of these skills in our youth. The good performance of the Finnish youth in PISA evaluation has not been left unnoticed. What are the elements that support the good performance and good scholar skills in the Finnish educational system?

EQUALITY

Since the sixties the Finnish schooling has been based on the emphasized idea of **equality**. Almost all Finnish children initiate the educational career at the age of 7. The first 9 years they attend the Finnish basic school (comprehensive school) and 99.7% of them leave the school with qualifications for continued education. After those 9 years, at the age of 16, approximately half of the graduates continue to upper secondary school (gymnasium) as the other half continues to vocational schools (or training). So, all Finnish children get the same basic education with the same qualifications.

QUALIFIED TEACHERS

All **Finnish teachers** in comprehensive school and in upper secondary school have their masters degrees from highly valued universities. Though the salaries aren't very good, considering the length of their studies, teachers profession is valued quite high in comparison with other professions. Year after year graduates from upper secondary schools apply for universities to become teachers - sadly only a small amount of the applicants can get in and start their studies due to the vast amount of applicants. The faculties of pedagogy and educational sciences are year after year one of the most popular faculties in Finnish universities.

CURRICULUM

All Finnish schools have the **same base curriculum** given by the National Board of Education. The base curriculum gives the minimum timeframe for different age groups and for different school subjects. Local municipal authorities (board of culture and education) can add some local features for the curriculum and even a school can add some features and specialities to the curriculum in practise. This means that education and schooling is about the same, and as good everywhere inside the country borders. The strengths of school and its teachers can be taken in consideration.

GOVERNANCE

Governance is considered mainly a positive term in education - even in schools. Actions and decisions of municipal authorities are being evaluated and their duties are stated in legislation. The resources to education are controlled by the Ministry of Education - which takes care of approximately half the costs of the comprehensive and upper secondary schools - leaving the other half to the municipal decision makers. Millions of Euros are spent by the Ministry of Education and National Board of Education for different agendas needed to be emphasized or paid more attention to (political decision or result of national evaluation). In recent years schools and local authorities have applied and received extra funding for ICT-projects and computers, teacher training, developing special education, developing science-education etc. Instead added control or inspection, there is a lot of resource-based guidance - or governance.

ELEMENT OF TRUST

The Finnish education system is based on the element of trust. There is no national compulsory or standardized testing for whole age groups in Finnish comprehensive school (7-16). There is no national or regional inspection system for schools. The value of "good education" is commonly shared and taken care of - regardless of the town or district one lives in.

In the last year of upper secondary school almost all students take their matriculation exams. This is often the first national test for the individual student in a 12-year educational "career". Some randomized testing is done in different school subjects in randomly picked schools, just to be sure (nationally) that the development is going in the right direction nationwide. The school inspection systems ended in the late 1970's - early 1980's.

As the idea of the Finnish education system is built on **trust**, the evaluation of education is focused more on the elements of good education (school buildings, group sizes, teachers' skills, resources for special education, etc.) than on the actual performance of a student. If good elements of education are considered to be in danger in some municipalities, there is legislation to keep the local authorities in "discipline". So, instead of controlling the schools - the control is to local resources and to local decision makers.

DECENTRALIZATION VS. CENTRALIZATION

I have a long (some 25 years) experience of Finnish education as a teacher, as a headmaster and in local administration as a director of culture and education. When I started as a teacher in the mid 1980's, the decentralization of educational decision making was executed nationwide. The roles of local authorities and teachers were emphasized. Local curriculums were formulated by teachers, and their work was based on the national base curriculum.

The 1990's were the time of liberation as the national base curriculums gave more room to local (and school-) defined variations in comprehensive education and even in upper secondary education. Some schools profiled themselves to different school subjects (for example to math and science, music, PE or arts). Decisions were made on school level - often in staff meetings - and confirmed in school boards.

The recent (2004-) approach to education is built on strong resource-based governance by the state and strong local focus on the structures and the disciplines of education. The proposal for the new national frame for the curriculum for comprehensive school was published on 1st of June, 2010. After a short period of public discussion and statements from a wide range of interest groups (teacher union, political groups, etc.) the proposal for the new curriculum for comprehensive education and the related legislation is given to the

hands of the national parliament. The final form of the curriculum is once again done locally by teacher groups and approved by local authorities and political decision-makers.

"HEADMASTERING" – BUILDING THE TRUST

The decentralization of schooling has led to the stronger role of local municipal authorities and to local political decision-makers and especially to the role of the headmasters. In the 1980's, headmasters were considered as officials and they were supervised and even guided by school boards. In the 1990's, most of the school boards were abolished and the role of a headmaster was emphasized. A Headmaster's role as a manager of a school was recognised and the total control (+accountability) to funds was handed over. The vast amount of autonomy and responsibility in a headmaster's office lead to the experienced need of guidance and support (by the headmasters and teachers). Governance in education has a positive accent, which in my opinion, was mainly the result of the autonomy handed to the school. One result of increased autonomy of a school was the new, more active role of parents. They are gathered in the schools (by headmasters) for discussions of values in education. They were encouraged to give feedback to schools and to headmasters considering the education of their children.

As the local control of schooling was given more to the hands of headmasters, the markets opened to quality control systems. Dozens of different approaches to measuring and securing quality in school were introduced in the late 1990's. Headmasters and their schools were involved in more and more complicated processes of self assessment and self evaluation. Through these some 15 years of increased school autonomy, the trust in education and in schools increased and the results were recognised excellently.

The recent development of governance in education has heightened the position of national unity. Though the Finnish results in PISA-evaluations have been excellent, there has been more and more discussion of the contents of public education (comprehensive-upper secondary education). By using resource-based steering the Ministry of Education has emphasized and supported some contents of schooling (after school activities, smaller groups, special education, ICT, etc.). These actions have increased the common trust in education and in politicians - and even in headmasters.

FROM MANAGERISM TO LEADERSHIP

As the role of a headmaster in school changed, the demands and expectations of the office of headmasters have risen accordingly. Instead of being "just" a manager of a school, headmasters are encouraged to take more responsibility of coaching and empowering the staff, to use modern methods of steering instead of ruling, to facilitate and support good elements of teaching and learning, encourage team work in school and to create chances for discussion of values both in and out of school. A good headmaster keeps his or her skills and knowledge up to date by reading, studying, continued training, benchmarking and networking with other headmasters. Sometimes these rising expectations and demands have resulted in reduced interest in the profession of a headmaster, though good headmasters are recognised and highly valued in our society.